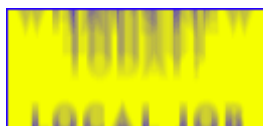




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## Mapping the way for ships

Sunday, November 16, 2003

By Jeff Kart  
Times Writer

The Saginaw River shipping channel in Bay City is filling in with silt.

It's supposed to look like a U, about 200 feet wide and at least 22 feet deep, according to federal standards.

Instead, it looks more like a V. In the downtown area by Wenonah Park, the channel is about half as wide, and the edges are only 19 feet deep.

A new U.S. Army Corps of Engineers boat was out surveying the river depth recently to prepare for maintenance dredging in the summer. A portion of the lower Saginaw, between the river's mouth and Liberty Bridge in Bay City, will be dug out to better accommodate ships.

The exact location is yet to be determined, but about 150,000 cubic yards of silt will be dredged and deposited at

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Channel Island, a confined disposal facility in the Saginaw Bay, said Donald D. Holly, operations team leader for the Corps in Detroit.

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The work, estimated to cost \$750,000 to \$1 million, will be paid for with federal money, Holly said.

"The Saginaw is a commercial project, so that's kind of a priority with us," he said.

Two civil engineering technicians, Rick V. Delestowicz and Barb H. Anderson, operate the boat, which surveys waters from Marquette to Saginaw.

The 23-foot craft is based at the Corps office on Henry Street in Bay City, at the Army Reserve Center, and hauled by trailer.

It came to town this year from a Corps station in Kewaunee, Wis., which had used it for about five years.

The boat replaced a larger and heavier 26-foot boat that the local Corps used for about 15 years, Delestowicz said.

The craft is fitted with high-tech equipment, similar to a fish finder. A satellite positioning system, a laptop computer and a "sonic sounder" device work together to map the river bottom.

The driver, Delestowicz, pilots the boat along the river in 100-foot intervals.

A device on the bottom of the boat measures the depth using sound waves.

The Corps is processing the information to decide where the dredging will be needed in the summer.

Holly said his agency is continuing to dredge portions of the lower river annually because there is still room for dredging spoils at Channel Island.

The confined disposal facility there is nearly filled with mud, but a dike on the island has been raised to make room for additional dredgings, Delestowicz said.

The upper Saginaw River, south from Bay City to Saginaw, hasn't been dredged in years due to the lack of a confined disposal facility. Local officials have been discussing possible upper river disposal sites.

The upper river was last dredged in 1993, to remove some shoals that hampered shipping. The entire river channel hasn't been dredged to its mandated depths for more than 20 years.

The Corps boat surveys the Saginaw River and Bay every year, traveling 18 miles from Saginaw to the mouth of the river, and an additional 14 miles out into the bay. The trip takes about six weeks to complete, Delestowicz said.

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